"In my 40 by 60-ft. building, I can produce enough fodder to maintain 600 head a day," says McCafferty.

Custom Fodder System Made To Order

Joel McCafferty's Integrated Fodder, Inc. (IFI) hydroponic fodder system was custom-designed for his Montana cow/calf and sprout-fed beef operation. Now he's helping other ranchers design systems for their ranches. For him, an IFI system removes much of the economic and weather risks he would otherwise face and offers more flexibility.

"Soon after we installed our system, we were hit by a major drought," says McCafferty. "When other ranchers were buying hay at $300 per ton, we were at a third that cost. I lost land and was able to buy bred cows that were really cheap. We made money all through the drought."

McCafferty first learned about fodder in 2008 when a friend purchased a hydroponic system.

"The process was horrible, but the feed was interesting," he recalls. "I started feeding some and saw some real benefits in my calves."

He built his own fully manual system in 2016. He quickly ran into problems with water use, mold and a massive amount of labor. At the time, he believed it to be the largest hydroponic fodder system in the U.S. for fattening beef. He was fattening around 100 head of beef with sprouted barley and peas in a mixed ration with hay and barley straw. While other calves went the commercial route, he started direct marketing his fattened animals.

"The cattle did great on the fodder, and our customers were very positive about the sprout-fed beef," says McCafferty.

However, the problems became overwhelming. By 2019, he was prepared to stop producing fodder. A conversation with a new neighbor changed everything.

"He told me how much he liked our sprout-fed beef," says McCafferty. "I thanked him but said I was considering quitting. He asked me why, and I explained."

The neighbor was from Michigan, where he owned two factories and also had a factory in Mexico that focused on automation in the automobile industry. When COVID hit in 2020 and businesses shut down in Michigan, he put his engineers to work on the problems McCafferty had outlined.

"Six months later, we formed Integrated Fodder and installed our new system," says McCafferty. "We basically doubled our gross income and added zero land. Our grazing is better, and we use much less water."

One feature of the system is its lower water use. The industry standard requires at least 15 gal. of water per pound of fodder produced, while the IFI system uses only 1/10 gal. per pound.

McCafferty describes water as the enemy in hydroponics. The less water needed, the easier it is to handle the fodder. With less water and grain as it comes out of the combine (no cleaning required), he has significantly reduced mold problems.

Labor is another drawback of hydroponic systems. In his old setup, McCafferty had to lift and handle hundreds of pounds of wet fodder each day. The new system is fully automated from seeding to harvest. It captures excess water and adds it into the ration, capturing sugars and other nutrients.

"In my 40 by 60-ft. building, I can produce enough fodder to maintain 600 head a day," says McCafferty. "All I have to add is fiber, typically straw, which I get cheap—just bale it and take it home. I spend about 30 min. a day on fodder production."

McCafferty emphasizes the importance of a system that fits the operator's specific needs. IFI can build a system that produces as little as 1,500 lbs. per day or as much as 160,000 lbs. per day. It can be completely or partially manual, or fully automated like his. The fodder can be harvested from day one through day seven, based on the operator's preference.

He suggests that cattlemen thinking about an IFI system begin by assessing their existing production setup.

"Look at where fodder would fit," he says. "Can you market sprout-fed beef at a premium? How would you use fodder, and do you know the risks if it doesn't fit your operation? We want our customers to have the least amount of risk going into this."

Instead of expanding his land, McCafferty has added grain bins. This is where some flexibility comes into play. He can fill the bins when commodity prices are low. If the price rises, he can sell the grain or hold onto it, knowing he has three to five years of feed stored.

"Our advantage is locally produced grain with the ability to produce fat cattle that can compete in the market with grain-fed," says McCafferty. "We keep the money here in our local community."

Even the beef processing remains local. McCafferty partnered with several others to set up a local butcher shop. Beef fed on fodder is aged, cut and sold directly to local consumers, restaurants and others, as well as online. He notes that people want to buy local, but the meaning of the word has changed.

"They want to know where the food comes from and how it's raised," says McCafferty. "That's true for people here in Montana and people in New York City."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Integrated Fodder, Inc., 409 Beckstrom Rd., Belt, Mont. 59412 (ph 406-899-5129; info@ifodder.com; www.ifodder.com).

GoodEgg is made from 100% food-grade silicone. Its bird-nest shape has holes to flush away water and 650 nubs for scrubbing.

Gentle Brush Cleans Eggs Better

Get an egg brush from GoodEgg to clean eggs faster. Add their wash, and your eggs will be even cleaner. The products were created out of Amy and Bryce Van Leuven's frustration with cleaning their backyard duck and chicken eggs. Along with partner Tim Rowberry, they found a solution.

"We figured there had to be a dedicated tool that would solve the problem, but we couldn't find anything," recalls Amy. "We wondered why no one had done it; it seemed simple enough."

They quickly realized it wasn't as simple as they thought. They tested sponges and scrubbing pads, but while they conform to the egg shape, they get clogged and trap bacteria.

They soon settled on 100% food-grade silicone and designed a bird-nest shape with holes to allow water to wash away waste. For the surface, they selected 650 nubs to aid in scrubbing. They also found a 99% organic enzyme wash that breaks down bacteria without penetrating the shell.

"The silicone is naturally antibacterial, antimicrobial and hydrophobic," says Bryce. "The GoodEgg brush can be flipped inside out and rinsed in the sink or run through the dishwasher."

Getting a patent wasn't a problem. A Kickstarter campaign for brushes and bottles of wash raised $150,000 in preorders within just 30 days, showing that the idea connected with small egg producers. Unfortunately, it didn't gain traction with manufacturers.

"We called every U.S. manufacturer, and the few who took us seriously said molds would cost a million dollars," recalls Bryce. "We had some local connections that had quality work done by reputable people in China. We went with them."

Even then, there were hiccups in production. The delays caused setbacks in deliveries throughout 2023. While they finally arrived, the bottles of wash didn't.

"We had to find bottles and fill them, get labels made and stick them on," says Amy. "We shipped out thousands of them."

Even before they shipped their first product, another problem emerged.

"By the time the brushes were delivered to us, we had hundreds of companies selling knockoffs on Amazon," says Bryce. "In the past two years, we've had 9,000 knockoffs removed from Amazon, but more show up every day."

Even amid competition from inferior knockoffs, the company is thriving. A larger brush for duck eggs and big chicken eggs was added, along with branded merchandise. The partners plan to introduce new products.

A recent presentation on ABC's Shark Tank earned them an angel investment from Chip and Joanna Gaines. In their pitch, they shared their success with over $2.5 million in sales, including $1.1 million in their first year alone. They're on track to reach $3 million in revenue this year. They're also on schedule to have all manufacturing in the U.S. by the end of November.

"We've partnered with another Shark Tank alumni who's trying to solve small-scale manufacturing in the U.S.," says Bryce. "We'll be price competitive with China."

A GoodEgg brush is priced at $20, and a bottle of wash costs $15. A kit that includes both brushes, 12 oz. of wash, and a concentrated refill is available for $55. In addition to online sales, these products are available through retailers nationwide.

GoodEgg donates 10% of all profits to GoodEgg Gives, a fund that supports people battling cancer and their families. This initiative comes directly from Amy's own fight with the disease. In May 2022, while in her second trimester of pregnancy, she was diagnosed with Stage IV breast cancer.

The product launch was delayed. She was able to deliver a healthy baby girl and fight cancer. She was found to have no evidence of disease (NED). However, she has since experienced a recurrence and is once again battling the disease. GoodEgg Gives is part of that fight.

"My cancer journey really opened my eyes to how little is available to help with the everyday financial struggles those with cancer experience while in the fight of their lives," related Amy on her blog. "It became my dream to be able to give back to these amazing warriors, so that we can help lift that burden for them, even if it's just a little bit."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, GoodEgg (ph 801-341-9821; howdy@goodeggstuff.co; www.goodeggstuff.co).